



U.S. Immigration
and Customs
Enforcement

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News Release

ICE arrests 34 illegal aliens working at North Tonawanda hydroponic tomato farm *- Aliens to be charged with criminal violations -*

NORTH TONAWANDA, N.Y. — Special Agents with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) arrested 34 illegal aliens this morning found working at the Fortistar Hydroponic Tomato Greenhouse in North Tonawanda.

All 34 aliens will be criminally charged by the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Western District of New York, according to U.S. Attorney Terrance P. Flynn. Each faces two criminal charges: use of a fraudulent alien registration card ("green card") and false use of a Social Security number. They will also be administratively charged with being illegally present in the U.S. and will be scheduled for a removal hearing before a federal immigration judge.

An ICE investigation prior to this morning's arrests revealed that illegal aliens were working at the farm using false social security numbers. At 8:00 a.m. today special agents served a warrant at the facility authorizing a search for illegal workers. Those arrested will make their initial appearances in federal court in Buffalo this afternoon.

"This case sends the clear message that we will pursue criminal charges against illegal aliens who obtain fraudulent documents in order to get jobs," said Peter J. Smith, special agent in charge of the ICE Office of Investigations in Buffalo. "Working in partnership with the U.S. Attorney's office, ICE has made it a priority to pursue criminal charges to deter an underground economy."

U.S. Attorney Terrance P. Flynn said, "Illegal immigration poses an increasing threat to our security, public safety and economy, and hard-hitting interior enforcement will reinforce the strong stance we already take at the border. Through strict enforcement of immigration laws in cases such as this, I am committed to aggressively targeting the growing support systems that make it easier for aliens to enter the country and find work outside the law."

The Department of Labor's (DOL) Office of Labor Racketeering and Fraud Investigations and the Social Security Administration's (SSA) Office of Inspector General were instrumental in conducting the investigation, according to ICE's Peter Smith. Said Smith, "We deeply appreciate the support and assistance provided by the Department of Labor's Inspector General, Gordon Heddell, and the Social Security Administration's Inspector General Special Agent in Charge, Edward J. Ryan."

ICE agents continue to investigate the circumstances surrounding how the aliens entered the country and where they procured the fraudulent documents.

ICE is significantly enhancing its worksite enforcement efforts as part of its interior immigration enforcement strategy. The Administration's budget request for FY 2007 calls for \$41.7 million in new funds specifically for ICE to strengthen worksite enforcement efforts. The additional resources would support the hiring of an additional 171 special agents and 35 support personnel to enhance worksite enforcement investigations.

The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) recently announced a new initiative to help employers ensure they are building a legal workforce through voluntary partnerships with the government. Called the ICE Mutual Agreement between Government and Employers (IMAGE), the program is designed to build cooperative relationships between government and businesses to strengthen hiring practices and reduce the unlawful employment of illegal aliens. The initiative also seeks to accomplish greater industry compliance and corporate due diligence through enhanced federal training and education of employers. DHS strongly encourages employers to review IMAGE program materials available at www.ice.gov.

ICE

U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement was established in March 2003 as the largest investigative arm of the Department of Homeland Security. ICE is comprised of four integrated divisions that form a 21st century law enforcement agency with broad responsibilities for a number of key homeland security priorities.